

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, MASS, PINS, ET, US

SUBJ: ISSUES INVOLVED IN ETHIOPIAN MILITARY RESUPPLY

REF: ADDIS 1626

1. SUMMARY. THE LARGE AMMUNITION REQUEST WHICH THE EPMG HAS NOW SUBMITTED TO MAAG IN CONNECTION WITH CURRENT MILITARY OPERATIONS IN ERITREA WILL BE THE SUBJECT OF A SEPARATE TELEGRAM. THE REQUEST PRESENTS USG WITH A NEW ISSUE WHICH WILL BE OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE FOR OUR FUTURE RELATIONS WITH ETHIOPIA, OUR POSITION IN ERITREA, AND OUR RELATIONS WITH VARIOUS ARAB COUNTRIES. THIS MESSAGE BRIEFLY DESCRIBES THE DISADVANTAGES OF ACCEPTING OR REJECTING THE MILITARY RESUPPLY REQUEST AND RECOMMENDS THAT CAREFUL CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION SUCH AS THOSE OUTLINED IN PARAGRAPH 6. END SUMMARY.

2. ON FEBRUARY 12, EPMG SUBMITTED A LARGE (ABOUT US\$30,000,000) AMMUNITION REQUEST TO DHMAAG. SINCE THAT TIME, THEY HAVE REVISED LIST ONCE AND AT THIS WRITING ARE IN PROCESS OF PROVIDING AN ADDITIONAL REVISION TO CHMAAG. THE REQUEST WILL BE FORWARDED TO WASHINGTON AS SOON AS MAAG CAN ANALYZE IT AND MAKE APPROPRIATE COMMENTS THEREON.

3. THE DISADVANTAGES OF REJECTION. IF THE USG TURNS DOWN THE EPMG'S REQUEST ON THE GROUND THAT IT DOES NOT WISH TO BECOME DEEPLY INVOLVED IN A CIVIL WAR SITUATION HERE, THE PMAC'S

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REACTION IS LIKELY TO BE ONE OF ANGER AND DEEP FRUSTRATION. IT

WOULD FEEL ITSELF TO BE IN A RATHER DESPERATE SITUATION BECAUSE OF THE NEED IT FEELS TO RESTORE ADEQUATE AMMUNITION LEVELS THROUGHOUT ETHIOPIA. THE PMAC MIGHT THEN ENDEAVOR TO PURCHASE THE AMMUNITION IT WANTS FROM WESTERN EUROPEAN SOURCES. IT WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO MEET THESE NEEDS QUICKLY BY TURNING TO THE SOVIETS OR THE CHINESE BECAUSE OF THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF THEIR AMMUNITION WITH AMERICAN WEAPONS. HOWEVER, WHAT IT PERCEIVED AS A USG REFUSAL TO COOPERATE IN SUPPRESSING THE ERITREAN INSURGENCY WOULD LEAD THE DIRG TO SET A CONSIDERABLY LOWER VALUE ON AMERICAN MILITARY ASSISTANCE. THOSE MEMBERS OF THE DIRG WHO HAVE ARGUED THAT ETHIOPIA SHOULD MAKE A DRASTIC SWITCH FROM THE US TO THE SOVIETS OR THE CHINESE AS ITS PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE WOULD FIND THEMSELVES IN A STRONGER POSITION. ETHIOPIA'S CONTINUED RELIANCE ON THE US AS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE WOULD BECOME MORE DOUBTFUL. THIS IN TURN MEANS THAT THE DIRG'S INTEREST IN CONTINUED CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE US WOULD BECOME MORE UNCERTAIN THAN IS PRESENTLY THE CASE.

4. WE JUDGE THAT A US REFUSAL TO PROVIDE AMMUNITION RESUPPLY AT THE PRESENT JUNCTURE WOULD BECOME WIDELY KNOWN OVER A PERIOD OF TIME. EVEN IF THE DIRG WERE TO BE REPLACED IN A COUP D'ETAT, THE RESENTMENT FELT BY MAJOR PORTIONS OF THE ETHIOPIAN ELITE AGAINST THE US FOR THIS REJECTION WOULD LIKELY HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE US. IN SUM, A REJECTION OF THE CURRENT MILITARY RESUPPLY REQUEST COULD LEAD, OVER A PERIOD OF TIME, TO A REORIENTATION OF ETHIOPIA'S MILITARY ASSISTANCE POSTURE AND TO TERMINATION OF THE TRADITIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE US AND ETHIOPIA.

5. THE DISADVANTAGES OF ACCEPTANCE (LEAVING ASIDE DOMESTIC CONSIDERATIONS IN THE USA). A POLICY OF BACKING THE EPMG WITH RESUPPLY IN A LENGTHY MILITARY STRUGGLE AGAINST THE ERITREAN INSURGENTS WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE. IT WOULD TOTALLY ALIENATE THE INSURGENTS THEMSELVES, A VAST MAJORITY OF THE ERITREAN PEOPLE, AND MANY ETHIOPIAN CRITICS OF THE DIRG'S HARDLINE POLICY. THIS REACTION ASSUMES MORE IMPORTANCE IN VIEW OF OUR GRAVE DOUBTS WHETHER THE ETHIOPIANS WILL BE ABLE TO CRUSH THE INSURGENCY, OR EVEN EVENTUALLY RETAIN ERITREA IN AN AUTONOMOUS STATUS,

IF THE MILITARY STRUGGLE CONTINUES FOR MUCH LONGER. THE LIKELIER
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OUTCOME IN OUR OPINION IS THAT THE ERITREANS WILL ACHIEVE AT LEAST DE FACTO INDEPENDENCE WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO, OR THAT THE INSURGENCY WILL CONTINUE INDEFINITELY AT A LEVEL OF MILITARY ACTIVITY FAR HIGHER THAN IN RECENT YEARS. THE PRINCIPAL FOREIGN SUPPLIERS INVOLVED IN THIS CIVIL WAR WOULD BE THE US ON THE ONE HAND AND ARAB COUNTRIES SUCH AS LIBYA, SAUDIA ARABIA, KUWAIT, SYRIA AND IRAQ ON THE OTHER. OVER A PERIOD OF TIME THE ERITREAN CONFLICT WOULD PROBABLY CAUSE INCREASING DIFFICULTIES FOR OUR RELATIONS WITH

THOSE COUNTRIES. OVER A PERIOD OF TIME THERE ALSO WOULD LIKELY BE INCREASING CRITICISM FROM MANY GOVERNMENTS THAT THE US WAS INTERFERING IN A CIVIL WAR SITUATION.

6. GIVEN THE SERIOUS DISADVANTAGES WHICH APPEAR TO BE CONNECTED WITH EITHER REJECTION OR ACCEPTANCE OF THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY SUPPLY REQUEST, WE RECOMMEND THAT THE DEPARTMENT GIVE CAREFUL CONSIDERATION TO ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

(A) TO POSTPONE A RESPONSE TO THE ETHIOPIAN REQUEST UNTIL WE HAVE HAD A THOROUGH DISCUSSION WITH THE EPMG REGARDING ITS ERITREAN POLICY, SO THAT WE ARE NOT COMPLETELY "BUYING A PIG IN A POKE."

(B) TO PROVIDE A MINIMUM AMMUNITION DELIVERY RESPONSE BUT STATE THAT WE HAVE GRAVE DOUBTS WHETHER FURTHER TRANCHES WILL BE POSSIBLE UNLESS THE EPMG HAS IN THE MEANTIME PUBLICLY OFFERED A MAXIMUM DEGREE OF AUTONOMY FOR ERITREA.

(C) TO PROVIDE A MINIMUM AMMUNITION DELIVERY RESPONSE BUT SIMULTANEOUSLY OFFER OUR SERVICES AS A MEDIATOR IN THE WHOLE ERITREAN ISSUE, INCLUDING DISCUSSIONS WITH THE ARAB STATES NOW SUPPLYING THE ERITREAN INSURGENTS.

(D) TO INFORM THE EPMG THAT WE DO NOT OBJECT TO THE USE OF US ARMS AND AMMUNITION TO MAINTAIN THE TERRITORIAL AND POLITICAL INTEGRITY OF ETHIOPIA BUT THAT IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES REPLACEMENT AMMUNITION MUST BE PURCHASED FROM WESTERN EUROPEAN OR MARKET SOURCES RATHER THAN THE USG. (WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER THIS WOULD BE FEASIBLE.)

(E) IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE SELECTED COURSE OF ACTION, TO STATE PUBLICLY THAT THE US GOVERNMENT STRONGLY HOPES FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT OF THE ERITREAN PROBLEM WITHOUT FURTHER BLOODSHED.
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